FROM THE BOOKSHELF NO. 149 JULY 13, 1976
JOHN ALBERT

"TOM PAINE AND REVOLUTIONARY AMERICA" BY ERIC FONER

ANNCR: THE VOICE OF AMERICA BRINGS YOU ANOTHER IN THE WEEKLY SERIES ...FROM THE BOOKSHELF...A SERIES IN WHICH WE REPORT ON BOOKS AMERICANS ARE READING. TODAY, JOHN ALBERT'S REPORT ON "TOM PAINE AND REVOLUTIONARY AMERICA" BY ERIC FONER, PUBLISHED BY NEW YORK OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS.

HERE IS BOOK EDITOR_____

EDITOR: WHAT ERIC FONER, PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AT THE CITY COLLEGE OF NEW YORK, HAS WRITTEN IS NOT A BIOGRAPHY --IN THE TRADITIONAL SENSE--OF AMERICA'S FIRST PROFESSIONAL POLITICAL PAMPHLETEER, THOMAS PAINE. WE LEARN VERY LITTLE ABOUT PAINE'S PERSONAL LIFE, BUT MUCH ABOUT THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH HE LIVED AND WROTE. FONER'S BASIC ARGUMENT IS THAT PAINE'S UNIQUE REVOLUTIONARY CAREER CANNOT BE FULLY UNDERSTOOD WITHIN THE CONFINES OF CONVENTIONAL BIOGRAPHY, BUT ONLY WITHIN THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

IN THIS NEW AND AMBITIOUS ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN TOM PAINE TO PRESENT DAY READERS, PROFESSOR FONER BRIEFLY DESCRIBES PAINE'S FIRST THIRTY SEVEN YEARS IN ENGLAND BEFORE HE CAME TO AMERICA IN 1774. THE SON OF A QUAKER, PAINE FIRST FOLLOWED HIS FATHER'S OCCUPATION AS STAYMAKER, THUS IDENTIFYING HIMSELF AS A MEMBER OF

EDITOR: (CONT) THE WORKING CLASS. THEN HE BECAME A REVENUE OFFICER, BUT WAS DISMISSED FOR INCOMPETENCE. LATER, HE WAS RE-ADMITTED, ONLY TO BE DISMISSED AGAIN, AFTER LEADING AN AGITATION FOR HIGHER SALARIES. HE THEN EARNED A LIVING FOR A WHILE AS AN ENGLISH TEACHER. HIS DABBLING IN SCIENCE LED TO AN INTRODUCTION TO BENJAMIN FRANKLIN WHO WAS THEN IN ENGLAND. FRANKLIN LATER HELPED HIM GET CONNECTED IN THE UNITED STATES.

IN ALL HIS ENDEAVORS IN THIS PERIOD OF HIS LIFE, PAINE WAS EXCEEDINGLY UNSUCCESSFUL. FROM THE TIME HE CAME TO AMERICA, HE SPENT MUCH OF THE REMAINDER OF HIS LIFE IN CENTERS OF POLITICAL TURMOIL AND WIDESPREAD ECONOMIC DISTRESS. THE UNHAPPINESS HE SAW ABOUT HIM IN ENGLAND AS WELL AS HIS FATHER'S QUAKER IDEAS INFLUENCED HIM. HE PUT ALL THIS KNOWLEDGE TO GOOD USE DURING HIS AMERICAN SOJOURN. HIS INFLAMMATORY VIEWS AND HIS ABRASIVE AND NON-CONFORMIST PERSONALITY ACCOUNT IN LARGE PART FOR THE ILL LUCK THAT--DESPITE HIS PHENOMENAL SUCCESS AS A PAMPHLETEER -- DOGGED HIM ALL HIS LIFE. BUT IN TERMS OF THE DEMOCRATIC WAVE OF THE FUTURE, HE WAS THE RIGHT MAN AT THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME.

LESS THAN TWO YEARS AFTER HIS ARRIVAL IN AMERICA, PAINE MANAGED TO PUBLISH HIS PAMPHLET, "COMMON SENSE," WHICH WAS BRILLIANTLY ATTUNED TO THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE EVEN THOUGH HIS EXPERIENCE HERE WAS SLIGHT. HE EMBODIED THE REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT THAT

EDITOR: (CONT) WAS THEN ABROAD. HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF AMERICANS READ HIS WORDS. "COMMON SENSE" WAS A BEST SELLER.

IN THE VIEW OF THE AUTHOR, WHAT MADE PAINE UNIQUE WAS THAT HE FORGED A NEW POLITICAL LANGUAGE , BY CREATING A LITERARY STYLE DESIGNED TO BRING HIS MESSAGE TO THE WIDEST POSSIBLE AUDIENCE. HIS RHETORIC WAS CLEAR, SIMPLE AND STRAIGHTFORWARD. HIS ARGUMENTS WERE ROOTED IN THE COMMON EXPERIENCE OF A MASS READERSHIP. PAINE'S PHILADELPHIA, MISTER FONER POINTS OUT, HAD UNDERGONE ENORMOUS POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES. BECAUSE OF THEIR INCREASING IMPORTANCE IN ECONOMIC LIFE, SKILLED LABORERS, PARTICULARLY THE CITY'S ARTISANS, HAD DEVELOPED A POLITICAL CONCIOUSNESS WHICH FOUND ITS VOICE IN PAINE'S WRITING. EVEN THE GREAT SCIENTIST OF COLONIAL PHILADELPHIA, BENJAMIN FRANKLIN AND DAVID RITTENHOUSE, HAD BEGUN LIFE AS ARTISANS.

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IT TOOK PAINE ONLY ONE YEAR IN AMERICA TO BECOME FAMILIAR WITH THE ISSUES AND ARGUMENTS OF THE COLONISTS' CONFLICT WITH BRITAIN, A BRITAIN HE KNEW ONLY TOO WELL, AND HE WAS READY TO ENLIST HIS LITERARY TALENT IN THE CAUSE OF INDEPENDENCE AND REPUBLICANISM. "COMMON SENSE" WAS SO SUCCESSFUL, PROFESSOR FONER BELIEVES, BECAUSE PAINE KNEW EUROPE WELL ENOUGH TO HATE ITS REPRESSIVE SOCIETY. HE LONGED "DESPERATELY ENOUGH FOR SALVATION TO ENVISION IN A FLASH OF ILLUMINATION THE DESTINY OF THE NEW WORLD AS LIBERATION FROM THE OLD."

OPT

EDITOR: (CONT) JOHN ADAMS, ONE OF THE MOST NOTABLE AMERICAN IDEOLOGUES, MAINTAINED THAT PAINE OFFERED NO NEW IDEAS. THE AUTHOR AGREES, BUT HE POINTS OUT THAT PAINE'S PLAIN LANGUAGE, WITH LIBERAL QUOTES FROM THE BIBLE, HIS FORCEFUL ARGUMENTS AGAINST CONCILIATION WITH ENGLAND AND HIS APPEAL TO THE MATERIAL INTERESTS, AS WELL AS THE IDEALISTIC HOPES OF THE COLONISTS CAME PRECISELY AT THE MOMENT WHEN AMERICANS WERE READY TO LISTEN. TO QUOTE MISTER FONER AGAIN: "THE SUCCESS OF 'COMMON SENSE' REFLECTED THE PERFECT CONJUNCTION OF A MAN AND HIS TIME, A WRITER AND HIS AUDIENCE, AND IT ANNOUNCED THE EMERGENCE OF PAINE AS THE OUTSTANDING POLITICAL PAMPHLETEER OF THE AGE OF REVOLUTION."

OPT

IN 1787, FIFTY YEARS OLD, PAINE RETURNED TO ENGLAND. IN 1791 HE PUBLISHED THERE ANOTHER FAMOUS PAMPHLET, "THE RIGHTS OF MAN." AGAIN HE REFLECTED THE SPIRIT OF THE NEWLY POLITICIZED ARTISANS AND LOWER CLASSES. "THE RIGHTS OF MAN" BECAME THE MOST POPULAR POLITICAL PAMPHLET IN ENGLISH HISTORY. IT WAS MAINLY AN ATTACK ON THE ENGLISH CONSERVATIVE, EDMUND BURKE, WHO HAD CRITICIZED THE FRENCH REVOLUTION. IN "THE RIGHTS OF MAN" PAINE ALSO DEVELOPED HIS IDEAS ON REPUBLICAN GOVERNMENT. HE POINTEDLY CONTRASTED THE NEW FRENCH SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT WITH THAT OF ENGLAND. IN A SECOND PART, PUBLISHED IN 1792, PAINE EXPLAINS HIS VIEWS ON THE DUTY OF THE STATE TO SOCIAL WELFARE. HIS PROGRAM, SAYS THE AUTHOR, IS CLOSE TO WHAT WE TODAY

EDITOR: (CONT) WOULD CALL A WELFARE STATE AS COULD BE IMAGINED IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY. AMONG OTHER THINGS, HE ASKS FOR DIRECT, PROGRESSIVE TAXES ON PROPERTY, ESPECIALLY LAND. FROM THE PROCEEDS, HE URGED THAT EVERY POOR FAMILY SHOULD RECEIVE A DIRECT ALLOCATION OF MONEY TO EDUCATE ITS CHILDREN.

PAINE'S SUPPORT OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION LED TO HIS ELECTION TO THE FRENCH NATIONAL CONVENTION. BUT FONER WRITES THAT THIS WAS THE MOST ENIGMATIC AND CONTROVERSIAL PERIOD OF PAINE'S LIFE. HIS MEAGER FRENCH AND LIMITED FAMILIARITY WITH FRENCH AFFAIRS, HIS INADEQUATE ATTEMPT TO APPLY HIS AMERICAN EXPERIENCE TO THE PROBLEMS OF FRANCE, WERE COMPLETE FAILURES. DISILLUSIONMENT SET IN. THE FINAL STRAW CAME DURING THE REIGHN OF TERROR WHEN HE WAS IMPRISONED FOR TEN MONTHS. FINALLY, THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR, JAMES MONROE, RESCUED HIM AS AN AMERICAN CITIZEN.

WHILE IN PRISON PAINE COMPLETED HIS MOST CONTROVERSIAL PAMPHLET "THE AGE OF REASON," IN WHICH HE ATTACKED ALL ORGANIZED RELIGION, RIDICULING THE BIBLE AND THE BASIC TENETS OF CHRISTIANITY. HIS FINAL PAMPHLET, "AGRARIAN JUSTICE," WITH ITS DISTINCTION BETWEEN PROPERTY PROVIDED BY NATURE AND PROPERTY CREATED BY THE LABOR OF MEN, WHILE CLOSELY FOLLOWING THE IDEAS OF JOHN LOCKE, ESTABLISHED PAINE, IN THE EYES OF ERIC FONER, AS ONE OF THE PIONEERS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY LAND REFORM MOVEMENT IN EUROPE AND AMERICA.

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EDITOR: (CONT) PAINE RETURNED TO AMERICA IN 1802. HERE, TOO, ILL LUCK DOGGED HIM. THE COUNTRY WAS IN THE MIDST OF A RELIGIOUS REVIVAL AND VILIFIED HIM FOR HIS ANTI-CHRISTIAN WRITINGS. WHEN HE DIED IN 1809 ONLY SIX MOURNERS ATTENDED HIS FUNERAL. THOMAS JEFFERSON, HIMSELF THE SUBJECT OF RELIGIOUS ATTACKS, AND OTHER FORMER FRIENDS, HAD FORSAKEN HIM IT TOOK YEARS, THE AUTHOR POINTS OUT, UNTIL HE WAS REHABILITATED TO THE IMPORTANT PLACE IN AMERICAN HISTORY HE NOW OCCUPIES.

MISTER FONER CONCLUDES THAT PAINE IS STILL RELEVANT TODAY, "NOT ONLY IN HIS REVOLUTIONARY INTERNATIONALISM AND DEFIANCE OF EXISTING INSTITUTIONS, BUT BECAUSE OF HIS MODERN CAST OF MIND. HIS RATIONALISM AND FAITH IN HUMAN NATURE, HIS BELIEF IN THE POSSIBILITY OF CASTING OFF THE BURDEN OF THE PAST AND REMAKING INSTITUTIONS..."

ANNCR: YOU HAVE BEEN LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF AMERICA WEEKLY PROGRAM FROM THE BOOKSHELF, IN WHICH WE REPORT ON BOOKS AMERICANS ARE READING. TODAY'S SELECTION WAS "TOM PAINE AND REVOLUTIONARY AMERICA" BY ERIC FONER. JOIN US AGAIN NEXT WEEK...(AT THIS TIME) FOR ANOTHER SELECTION FROM THE BOOKSHELF. THIS IS_____.

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